

A European External Action Service of the whole Union? Geographical and gender balance among the heads of EU delegations

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Abstract

This paper offers a snapshot of the geographical and gender distribution of staff at the level of heads of EU delegations (HoDs). The issue of the geographical and gender balance within this category has started to be addressed, as stipulated in the documents setting up the European External Action Service and in the political commitments of the High Representative. This trend should continue because, despite the overall positive evolution, imbalances still exist. The nationals of some member states are overrepresented among the HoDs, while those from other member states are not represented at all, or are underrepresented. At the same time women still account for less than 20% of all heads of EU delegations.

The High Representative and the European External Action Service (EEAS) are faced with the challenge of engaging the member states in the external action of the EU. One of the ways of ensuring a sense of ownership on the part of the member states in the new service is to create a proper geographical balance among its staff. Two years ago only one national from the ten newer member states headed one of the Commission delegations. The situation has improved since then but the geographical and gender balance among the heads of EU delegations (HoDs) is still an issue.

This paper aims to compare the geographical and gender balance at the level of heads of EU delegations at the start of the mandate of the current High Representative (December 2009) with the one from September 2011, in order to determine if the High Representative has taken measures to improve the geographical and gender balance within this category of staff. This timeframe includes the September 2010 and August 2011 batches of nominations (*rotations of HoDs*). Even if quotas might not be the best solution for addressing the issue of geographical and gender balance, in order to gain a sense of the status of these balances, quantification cannot be avoided.

The paper does not take into consideration the overall geographical distribution of the posts within the EEAS but focuses only on the category of heads of delegations. Therefore, the figures do not count the deputy heads of delegations or the *chargés d'affaires*. Neither does this commentary take into consideration the substantial differences in importance between the various EU delegations; this would entail an evaluation of the importance for the EU of each of the countries in the world. Distributing posts based on strong quotas and an ultimately partial measurement of importance would be unwelcome, and in any case could not feasibly be implemented. Thus, for this exercise, the EU delegations in the US or China are counted as having the same weight as those in Benin or Lesotho.

EPIN Commentaries offer concise, policy-oriented insights into topical issues raised by the debate on the political integration of Europe. The European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN) is a network of think tanks and policy institutes based throughout Europe, which focuses on current EU political and policy debates (see <http://www.epin.org> for more information). Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed are attributable only to the author in a personal capacity and not to any institution with which he is associated.

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The political context

The High Representative Catherine Ashton has pledged to promote geographical and gender balance, while the July 2010 Council Decision on the European External Action Service states that recruitment in the EEAS “should be based on merit whilst ensuring adequate geographical and gender balance. The staff of the EEAS should comprise a meaningful presence of nationals from all the Member States.”¹ The obligation of assuring a geographical balance of staff, specifically for the heads of delegations, is stated in the modified staff regulations.² Moreover, in her speech to the European Parliament on the creation of the EEAS, the High Representative expressed her commitment to ensuring a proper gender and geographical balance. Determining how geographical balance should look is not an easy task. A proposal by Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, a Polish EPP MEP, to have formal nationality quotas in the EEAS was rejected during negotiations in the European Parliament. However, the Parliament is determined to seek ‘softer’ ways of safeguarding geographical and gender balance in the service. For example, the chamber has successfully advocated revisiting the geographical and gender balance for the 2013 EEAS review and for “additional specific measures” to be taken if imbalances are found.

Besides the Brussels headquarters, the EEAS is made up of the EU delegations to third countries and to international organisations. The former Commission delegations have been upgraded to European Union delegations and their political role has grown as they now represent the whole Union and have also to deal with CFSP issues. Many heads of Commission delegations retained their positions after the upgrade of the delegations. Thus, the snapshot from December 2009 basically depicts the pre-Lisbon distribution of HoDs in which the nationality of an HoD played a lesser role than in the new system. The new EU delegations have to cooperate closely with member states’ embassies on the ground and issue declarations on local issues on behalf of the whole Union. Additionally, because staff coming from the diplomatic services of the member states should represent at least one third of EEAS staff, most of the newly appointed HoDs come from the diplomatic services of the member states. Thus, besides the increased role of the HoDs, the fact that most of the new posts are occupied by diplomats hailing directly from member states’ foreign ministries incentivises them further to lobby and place their nationals in these positions. While the heads of EU delegations do not represent and should not favour the member state of which they are a national, the efforts afforded by the member states to place ‘their’ people in these positions is an indication of how important geographical balance is to them.

The geographical balance

The EU has 137 delegations around the world, 118 of which were led in September 2011 by a head of delegation that came from one of 22 EU member states. Nationals of five member states (Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Cyprus and Malta) do not occupy any HoD position at the time of writing. For each member state the number of its nationals heading a delegation at the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon (the start of the mandate of the High Representative Ashton) was compared with the number of nationals holding HoD positions in September 2011. A *representation indicator* was calculated on the basis of the share of that member state’s population in the overall the EU population.³ It is calculated as the difference between a member states’ share of HoDs and its share of EU population. The table below depicts this indicator for all member states in the given period.

¹ Council Decision of 26 July 2010 establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service (2010/427/EU).

² Staff Regulations of Officials of the European Communities and the Conditions of Employment of other Servants of those Communities.

³ A similar representation indicator has been used by Ryszarda Formuszewicz and Jakub Kumoch in “The Practice of Appointing the Heads of EU Delegations in the Wake of the Council Decision on European External Action Service”, report of the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw, August 2010 (http://www.pism.pl/zalaczniki/PISM_Report_HoD.pdf).

Table 1. Geographical balance within the category of Heads of Delegations

Citizens of:	December 2009		September 2011		Representation indicator 2009-2011
	Number of HoDs	Representation indicator	Number of HoDs	Representation indicator	
Belgium	15	10.56%	14	9.69%	+
Portugal	6	2.96%	7	3.82%	-
Netherlands	8	3.48%	7	2.62%	+
Austria	4	1.72%	5	2.56%	-
Ireland	6	4.19%	4	2.50%	+
Greece	4	1.14%	5	1.98%	-
Spain	12	1.00%	13	1.83%	-
Luxembourg	0	-0.10%	2	1.59%	0
Denmark	0	-1.10%	2	0.59%	+
Czech Republic	0	-2.09%	3	0.45%	+
Latvia	0	-0.45%	1	0.40%	+
Lithuania	0	-0.67%	1	0.20%	+
Sweden	3	0.69%	2	-0.18%	+
Italy	17	2.39%	14	-0.20%	+
Finland	3	1.48%	1	-0.22%	+
France	16	0.68%	15	-0.24%	+
Hungary	1	-1.16%	2	-0.29%	+
Bulgaria	0	-1.52%	1	-0.65%	+
Romania	0	-4.30%	1	-3.41%	+
United Kingdom	11	-3.00%	9	-4.80%	-
Poland	0	-7.63%	2	-5.91%	+
Germany	12	-6.24%	7	-10.34%	-
Malta	0	-0.08%	0	-0.08%	-
Cyprus	0	-0.16%	0	-0.16%	-
Estonia	0	-0.27%	0	-0.27%	-
Slovenia	0	-0.41%	0	-0.41%	-
Slovakia	0	-1.08%	0	-1.08%	-
EU	118		118	EU	116

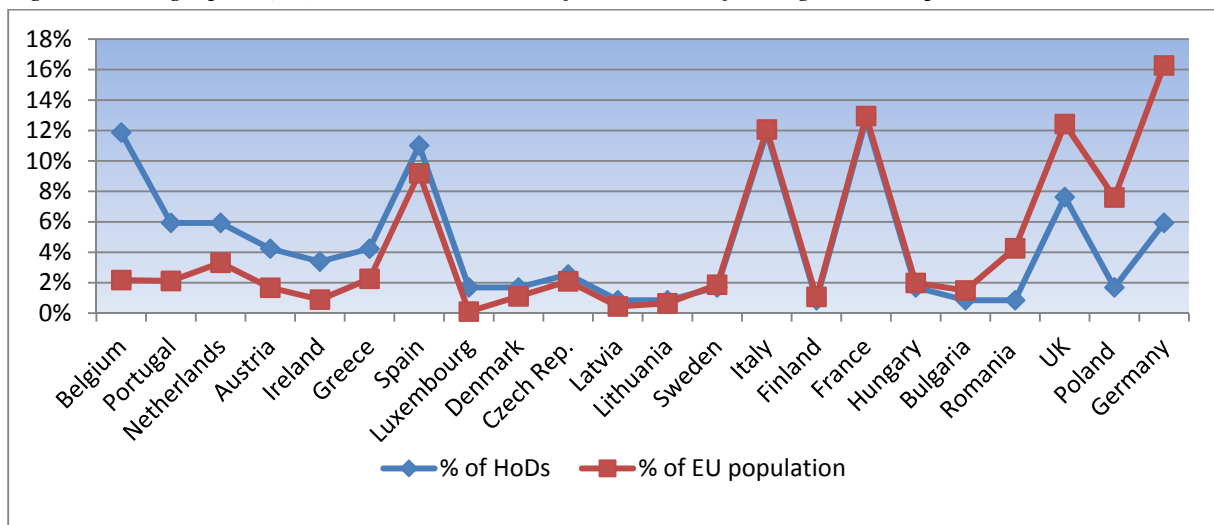
Source: Own compilation based on European Commission, European External Action Service and Eurostat data.

The data in the Table 1 is ordered according to the representation indicator for September 2011. The numbers in red depict overrepresentation (at the top of the table) and underrepresentation (at the bottom of the table), while the figures in green depict what is considered in this context as “proper representation”. A member state is considered to be properly represented if by adding or decreasing by one the number of HoDs that are its nationals its representation indicator would change from a positive number to negative one, or vice versa. Member states whose nationals do not lead any EU delegation

(in 2011) were put in a category of their own and are placed at the end of the table. The last column depicts the change from 2009 to 2011. If a country's over- or under- representation was reduced this is considered to be a positive evolution that is marked with a green "+" sign. If the over- or under- representation has increased or there was no change to improve the indicators, this is considered as being negative and is marked with a red "-" sign in the last column.

The trend of reaching a more geographically balanced EEAS at the level of heads of delegations is well underway. Between 2009 and 2011, the proportion of member states that are under- or overrepresented has dropped and the number of countries considered as "properly represented" has increased from 1 to 10. For 15 of the 27 member states, the rounds of HoDs nominations from 2010 and 2011 have redressed the balance of their representation, while for 11 this has either not changed or has even worsened. One country (Luxembourg) has moved from being underrepresented to being overrepresented. If in 2009 nationals of 13 member states were not heading any delegation, in 2011 this figure was reduced to 5. However, it is clear that some member states nationals remain overrepresented. The nationals most overrepresented come from Belgium, Portugal, Netherlands and Austria, while the most underrepresented nationals are from Germany, Poland, the UK and Romania, and five other states' nationals are not heading any of the EU delegations. The existing geographic imbalance is also visible in the graph below. The states whose nationals are overrepresented in the HoDs category are situated on the left side of the graph, in the middle the countries approach an adequate representation, while those that are underrepresented are situated to the right of the graph.⁴ The bigger the gap, the bigger the difference between member states' share of their population in the overall EU population and the share of their nationals occupying heads of EU delegations positions.

Figure 1. Geographic (im)balance at the level of EU Heads of Delegations, September 2011



As mentioned, these figures do not take into consideration the substantial differences in importance between the various EU delegations. However, a look at two groups of countries important to the EU, those from the G20 and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) shows a fairly good geographical balance among the heads of EU delegations. The EU delegations in the 15 non-EU members of the G20 are headed by nationals from 11 member states, with Portuguese, Spanish and German nationals being better represented.⁵ In 14 partner countries⁶ from the ENP area, the geographical balance is even

⁴ The member states whose nationals don't occupy any HoD position have not been included in this graph.

⁵ Portuguese nationals head the EU delegations in the US, Brazil and India; Spanish nationals head the ones in Argentina and Russia and German nationals head the EU delegations in Canada and China.

⁶ The Occupied Palestinian Territory is also not taken into consideration. The EU Delegation in Libya is also not taken into consideration as it was opened after September 2011, the most recent date taken into consideration for this study.

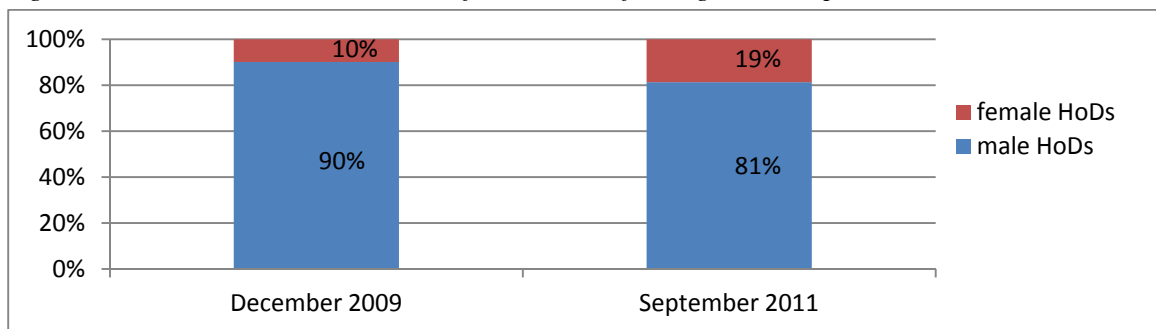
better, with nationals from 14 member states heading an EU delegation. The ENP area is also one in which the newer member states, generally underrepresented in the HoU category, are beginning to be better represented with nationals coming from Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria and Romania heading delegations in Jordan, Belarus, Georgia and Armenia respectively.

The gender balance

Even though the issue of gender balance did not appear as prominently in the debates about the creation of the EEAS, it is mentioned together with the issue of geographical balance in the main documents establishing the service and its rules. Moreover, the modified staff regulations mention that “the High representative will take appropriate measures [...] to promote equal opportunities for the under-represented gender in certain function groups, more particularly in the AD function group”.

The trend towards greater gender balance among heads of delegations is taking place, yet there is still a long way to go. Women accounted for only 10% of EU’s heads of delegations in December 2009. They accounted for 26% of the new HoD nominations, so that two years later their share within this category of staff has almost doubled to reach 19%. This has happened despite the fact that the higher ranks of the diplomatic services of the member states, a main source of personnel for the new nominations, are generally male-dominated.

Figure 2. Gender balance at the level of EU Heads of Delegations, September 2011



Conclusions

It appears that the issue of geographical and gender balance within the HoDs category has started to be addressed, as stipulated in the main documents setting up the European External Action Service and in the political commitments of the High Representative. This trend should continue because, despite the overall positive evolution, imbalances still exist. The nationals of some member states are overrepresented in the category of HoDs, while those from some other member states are not represented at all or are underrepresented. At the same time, women account for less than 20% of all heads of delegations.

It can be argued that calculating the distribution of posts based strictly on the population of the member states is always problematic. The differences between the populations of the EU member states can be considerable and this should not be directly translated into the distribution of posts in the EEAS.⁷

⁷ Even an alternative system of calculating the representation indicator that replaces the share of the member states’ population with their share of MEPs (that is calculated according to a system of degressive proportionality) shows that generally the countries found at the extremes of the list do not change significantly. In this alternative system of calculating the geographical representation - that we choose not to reproduce here - Belgium, Spain and Portugal appear to be the most overrepresented member states, while Germany, Poland and Romania appear as the most under-represented, apart from the member states that have no HoDs.

Despite the quantifications, it is not the intention of this paper to suggest that a strict system of quotas be introduced. However, the situation of the member states found at the extremes of the list (the overly under- and overrepresented) should be considered. While the most suitable and qualified people should occupy these positions, this principle does not exclude the need to achieve a certain geographical balance among this category of staff. To start with, all member states, no matter their size, should have at least one of their nationals occupying a position of head of EU delegation. This would ensure that even the smaller member states have a stake in the new service and this might contribute to their greater engagement in defining the EU's external policy. Measures should also be taken about the nationals of first three member states from both extremes, the ones that are over- and the ones that are underrepresented.

If the European Commission has managed to have more female than male employees, gender balance within the HoDs category is still overly male-dominated. While not compromising on the quality of the nominated HoDs, more measures need to be taken to improve the proportion of female HoDs within this category of staff.

About EPIN

EPIN is a network of European think tanks and policy institutes with members in almost every member state and candidate country of the European Union. It was established in 2002 during the constitutional Convention on the Future of Europe. Then, its principal role was to follow the works of the Convention. More than 30 conferences in member states and candidate countries were organised in the following year.

With the conclusion of the Convention, CEPS and other participating institutes decided to keep the network in operation. EPIN has continued to follow the constitutional process in all its phases: (1) the intergovernmental conference of 2003-2004; (2) the ratification process of the Constitutional Treaty; (3) the period of reflection; and (4) the intergovernmental conference of 2007. Currently, EPIN follows (5) the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty and – should the treaty enter into force – (6) the implementation of the Treaty.

Since 2005, an EPIN Steering Committee takes the most important decisions. Currently there are six member institutes: CEPS, DIIS (Denmark), ELCANO (Spain), HIIA (Hungary), Notre Europe (France) and SIEPS (Sweden).

Status quo

Currently there are 30 EPIN members from 26 countries, also from countries outside of the EU. The 'hard core' work of the network is based on the cooperation of about 10 most active institutes. The member institutes are quite diverse in size and structure, but are all characterised by political independence and the absence of any predetermined point of view or political affiliation.

EPIN organises two major conferences in Brussels per year; as well as ad hoc conferences or other activities in member states. The network publishes Working Paper Series and other papers, which primarily focus on institutional reform of the Union. The network follows preparations for the European elections, the EU's communication policy, and the political dynamics after enlargement, as well as EU foreign policy and justice and home affairs.

Achievements

EPIN is a network that offers its member institutes the opportunity to contribute to the 'European added-value' for researchers, decision-makers and citizens. The network provides a unique platform for researchers and policy analysts to establish personal links, exchange knowledge and collaborate on EU-related issues. Members bring their national perspectives to bear on the issues tackled and through collaboration they contribute to establish a 'European added-value' (e.g. on EU communication, flexible integration). By doing so they strengthen a common European dimension in the national debates on Europe.



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